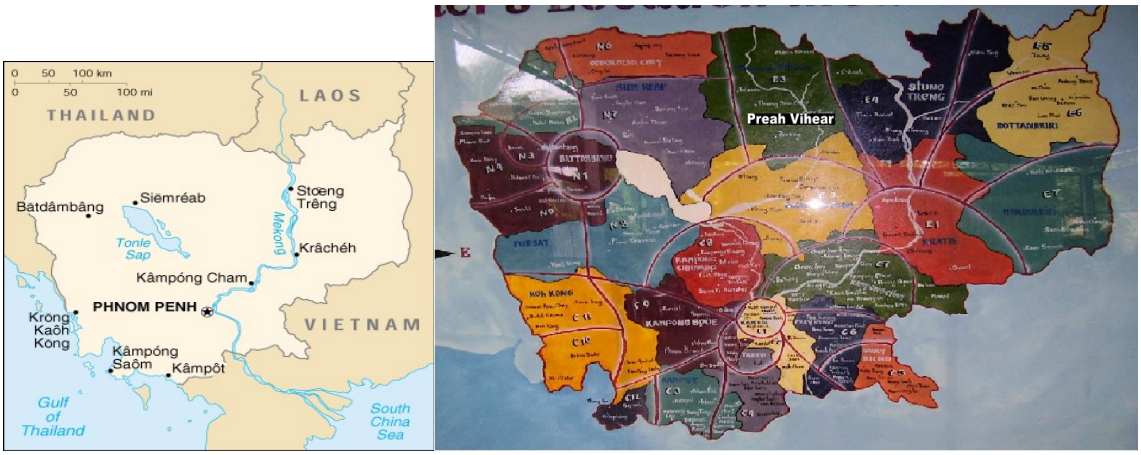
Cluster Preah Vihear, Cambodia

A Case Study

I. Introduction

Preah Vihear cluster is located in the northern part of Cambodia, in the plateau and mountain region bordering Lao People's Democratic Republic and Thailand to the north. It neighbours the Cambodian provinces of Oddormeanchey and Siem Reap to the west, Kampong Thom in the south and Stung Treng in the east.

Location of Cambodia and Preah Vihear Cluster



Preah Vihear (E 3) is one of the 28 clusters of Cambodia. It was one of the initial 13 virgin clusters. It was opened to the Faith in late 2000 by two brothers from Battambang who settled as home-front pioneers. Nurtured, supported and developed by the believers from the country's largest cluster, Battambang (N1) (with over 6000 Bahá'ís), Preah Vihear grew from 2 to 1861 believers in 6 short years. Its experience of systematic growth and integrated development has now become the pattern for systematic development for other clusters. Oddor Meancheay, also opened by the two brothers two years later, is also an advanced cluster with about 600 Bahá'ís. Two other clusters Bovel and Pursat following the same pattern of systematic development will launch intensive programs of growth in 2007/2008 (two years after their opening to the Faith).

In its inaugural message to the First National Convention (1994), The Universal House of Justice has called on Bahá'ís to assist Cambodia to evolve into a creative, productive and confident society. With the Training Institute as its main instrument for personal and social transformation, the Bahá'ís of Preah Vihear utilize their capabilities gained, to serve and develop their community.

The institute in close collaboration with the Bahá'í-inspired development agency, Cambodian Organization for Research, Development and Education (CORDE), apply Bahá'í Teachings to build the necessary capacities in the individual, institution and community to effect an integral process of material and social prosperity. These agencies involve the local population in application of their knowledge to determine their own path of development.

Social and Economic Characteristics of the Cluster

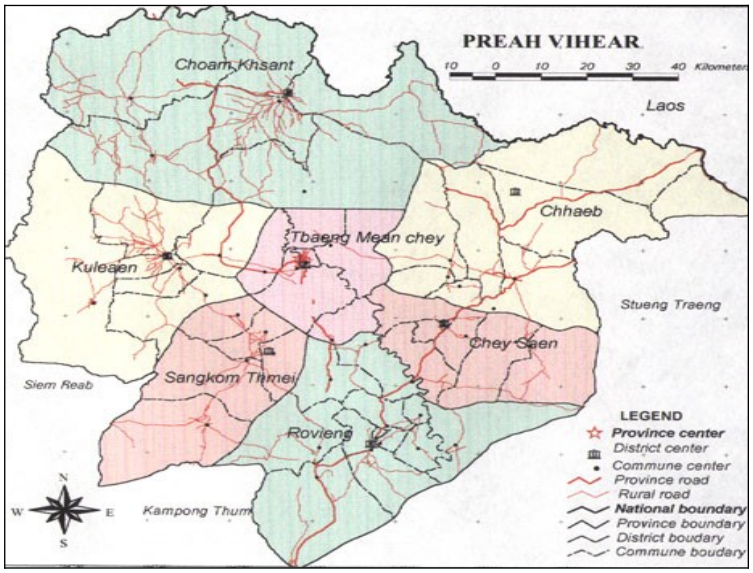
The population of Preah Vihear cluster is 150,000, representing 1% of Cambodia's population. Its land area covers 14,000 square kilometers making it the least densely populated of the 24 provinces of Cambodia. This is because it is one of the most heavily (land)mined areas in the world.

The population is distributed unevenly over its 7 districts which are divided into 49 Communes with a total of 204 villages. The province is headed by the Governor and each district, commune and village has its own respective chief.

Population distribution in Preah Vihear Districts and Towns.

Districts	**Population**
Chey Saen	19500
Chhaeb	15000
Choam Khsant	19500
Kuleaen	18000
Rovieng	33000
Sangkom Thmei	18000
Tbaeng Mean Chey	27000
Total	150,000

Preah Vihear –



The population is almost homogenous, mainly Khmer. These are the descendents of Indian Brahman who came to Cambodia as early as 1st Century A.D. Preah Vihear houses the imposing mountain-temple of Prasat Preah Vihear and Preah Khan from the Angkorian Era which spanned 600 years from 802 to 1432. These ruins stand as reminders of the high culture and spirituality of that civilization. It was influenced by Hinduism and Theravada Buddhism which entered the country in the 13th century and began to spread under King Jayavarman VII to the whole country till it became state religion in the 15th

century. Buddhism is pervasive. Almost every village has a Buddhist temple - or *'wat'* - around which village life centers. It offers shelter spiritual education and refugee to those in need and the homeless. Many Cambodian males at some point of their lives spend time in a Buddhist monastery as novice. Buddhists use the lunar calendar and there are several significant religious holidays and festivals that are widely observed. Most important ceremonies - weddings, funerals, coming of age - have both Buddhist and animist elements. There are some 500,000 Cham-Malays who practice Sunni Islam and approximately 60,000 are Christians, mostly Roman Catholics. Almost all the Chinese in Cambodia are Taoist or Confucians. There are currently over 12,000 Bahá'ís, making the Bahá'í Faith a significant minority religion.

The main language is Khmer which has been enriched by the Indian Pali and Sanskrit languages and influenced by Thai and French.

Preah Vihear bears the scars of the turbulent decades of the Khmer Rouge era (1970-1990). Pol Pot's attempt at reeducating the masses to turn Cambodia into an agrarian society saw the evacuation of the towns and the people were taken to villages like those of Preah Vihear to work in rice farms. Families were torn apart; men, women and the children put in separate work camps. Food, mostly broth was provided twice a day. It is said then that farm animals received better food than humans. In these conditions, hunger and disease, punishments including death took more than 2 million lives. Schools were closed. People were not encouraged to think for themselves but the ideology of the Government would do the thinking for them. As such learned people were seen as enemies and were put to death. When all this ended, the country was left with a people, who had lost everything, their property, their culture and their intellectuality. Those in the villages escaped with little damage to themselves physically but suffered mentally as those from urban areas.

Rebuilding began in the year 1991 under the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) administration and continues under the present government but has been slow and the parity between rich and poor obvious. Poverty is still rampant. In terms of employment, about 83.7% are in the primary sector, 1% in the secondary and 15.3 percent in the tertiary sectors. As men tend to leave home to seek employment, the percentage of women in the primary sector is nearly 10 percent higher then men.

The economically active (15-65 years old) is 53% of the Preah Vihear population. However, children and junior youths (43%) deprived of education are also active workers. The elderly (above 65) is only 4%. This is due to its long civil strife (1970-1990) and low life expectancy.

There are little or no basic amenities in Preah Vihear. Power supply is from private generators and water is mainly from wells, rivers and springs. Mobile phone is the main means of communications but there is no internet or television. Phnom Tbeng Meanchey is linked to the rest of Cambodia through Siem Reap and Kompong Thom. However, both these roads are laterite while others just plain tracks, often eroded by rain.

II. History of the Faith in Preah Vihear

The history of the Bahá'í community in Cambodia dates back to mid-1950s and gained official recognition in 1960s. However, like all other religious communities, the Bahá'ís were dispersed during civil strife beginning 1970. During the two decades internal strife, military coups, genocide, isolation and economic crisis in the country, about 2 million were displaced while many of their kindred were killed. More than 500,000 lived as refugees along the Thai-Cambodian border and over 100,000 in holding centers inside Thailand. Over 100,000 came in contact with Bahá'ís serving in development agencies and investigated the Bahá'í principles which they believed would help them to build a better community. Thousands accepted the Faith in these camps especially in Site 2 and Site 8 and formed Bahá'í communities in these camps. Many of the Bahá'ís were accepted to settle in United States of America, France and Australia. Others continued to acquire skills and prepare for the day they could be accepted by foreign countries or return to Cambodia.

With signing of the Paris Peace Agreement in 1991 and the administration by the United Nations Transitional Authority, Cambodia was re-opened to the Faith. Bahá'ís who were refugees returned to different parts of Cambodia. Hundreds of Bahá'ís from neighbouring countries, responding to the call of The Universal House of Justice, went to Cambodia to fight the thoughts of war with thoughts of peace. Unable to speak Khmer, these travel teachers and pioneers distributed over 100,000 booklets on the Faith. It was estimated that these booklets were read by over a million people. Over a thousand accepted the Faith and communities mushroomed all over Central and West Cambodia. By 1994, there was a vibrant community of 5,000 with 22 Local Spiritual Assemblies and official recognition of the Faith by the Government. Presided over by Beloved Hand of The Cause of God, Amatu'l Bahá, Rúhíyyih Khánum, the inaugural National Convention was held and the first National Spiritual Assembly of Cambodia was successfully elected.

From the early days of its development, Cambodia benefited from the Ruhi Institute courses. Batches of believers studied Books 1 and 3, which were the only books available at that time. Children classes multiply as a result. The courses were introduced in Battambang in 1996 and it spread like wildfire. By 1999, 608 have completed Book1, 112 Book 2, 18 Book 3 and 4 Book 4. By 2000, 948 have completed Book 1, 146 Book 2, 66 Book 3 and 28 Book 4.

However, Preah Vihear remained a virgin cluster as none of the refugee Bahá'ís came from Preah Vihear and none settled in Preah Vihear upon their return.

In late 2000, a Bahá'í from Battambang was offered a job with a NGO to set up rice bank in Preah Vihear. He brought his younger brother to teach English in a private school. The younger introduced the Faith to an energetic youth whom he

met in a restaurant. The brothers started devotional gatherings with this youth who brought two other youths. During the school vacation of 2002, these three youths were encouraged to go to Battambang to attend a 3 month intensive course comprising of the study of agriculture, Ruhi courses 1-3, and an introductory booklet called 'Flowers of One Garden' by Mr. A. Q. Faizi, Hands of the Cause of God. These were the only Bahá'í books, besides prayers and Hidden Words, that were translated into Khmer. They were joined by 20 others from around Battambang. The majority of this group remains actively engaged in the core activities till today and many are serving as members of institutions and institute co-ordinators.

Upon completion of the course, the three youths returned and two of the youths started children's classes. Although the material was meant for children, the children classes were attended by more than 40 junior youths and youths who yearned for education. Cut off from most of Cambodia because of poor infrastructure and access, most of the people were unable to complete their education. Schools had not reopened in the rural areas and there were a few in towns. The children were deprived of education. Children were deprived of education. Even till today, schools are only built in the main population centers. What the Bahá'ís offered was regarded as alternative education and was welcomed by the community.

The literacy level of the adult and youth population, however, was high as they had studied in the refugee camps. The two youths tutored 23 participants Book 1. They were receptive to the Creative Words. Of the 23 participants 3 started devotional gatherings with friends, students and neighbors. The number of participants attending the first devotional gathering was 15. Of the 23 original participants of Book 1, thirteen continued with Book 2. Upon completing Book 2 the participants planned activities to teach the Faith. A lot of questions about the Faith were posed to them and tried to answer all questions from the texts of Books 1 and 2, as these were their main reference books. During this teaching endeavor 10 people accepted the Faith.

The institute courses and children classes were like water for a thirsty population. Most are touched by the Divine Elixir and accept the Cause of God. "*These Words brought life to our hearts and minds after years of fear and suppression. It is like water to dying plants, allowing us to grow again. Bahá'í Faith is good for our people after those years of suffering and hopelessness. It showed me the right path and it is good for everybody It is easy to be good with the Bahá'í Faith showing us the way,"* shared an early believer.

Because of the demand for education for the children and junior youths, these two youths voluntarily initiated daily classes using curriculumn shared with them by the Bahá'í-inspired private initiative, CORDE (Cambodian Organisation for Research, Development and Education). The material was for literacy and moral education conducted as informal education classes. The youths sustained the 4 classes with over 80 children, junior youths and youths for more than 3 months. Parents pleased with this effort, petitioned CORDE to ensure the

continuity of these tutorial classes. CORDE trained the youths to offer its “Hope for the Heart” literacy program. For most of the children participating, this was the only education they were receiving.

CORDE is a not-for-profit development organization with the stated aim of involving the local population “*in the process of social and economic transformation and of upraising the quality of human life and well-being of individuals, families and communities, upholding the principles of human honour and dignity through the provision of viable and sustainable projects that will enhance their capacities and capabilities, thereby increasing the level of participation resulting in empowerment for a long-term sustained impact.*” It was established in 1994 by a group of seven Bahá’ís who have committed themselves to utilize the knowledge and skills gained at the refugee camps to assist Cambodia to evolve into ‘a creative, productive and confident society” as called for by The Universal House of Justice. It was animated by two key principles: firstly the capacities and capabilities of the people in a region have to be enhanced to determine their own path of development and secondly, they must engage in systematic learning, translating their education and training into development action.

Institute Process and the Creating of Human Resources

During the school vacation period of 2003, another batch of youths with recognized moral leadership was sent to complete Books 3-4. More study circles were initiated upon their return. By this time, the homefront pioneers have transferred to Oddor Meanchey, another virgin cluster. The youths took ownership of the institute process. Through the study circles another 10 had accepted the Faith. This group conducted children’s classes which were attended by about 50 children. Ten of the youths studied and completed Book 3. Three started 4 children’s classes with about 62 children, 11 of whom are not Bahá’ís. By July 2004, it was reported that there were 13 junior youth groups with 213 participants (33 non Bahá’ís) studying ‘Breezes of Confirmation’. They had 8 devotional gatherings with 69 friends. They had Nineteen Day Feast in one locality attended by usually 20 believers. They initiated tutor gathering to improve their capabilities. Along side, these youths also voluntarily carry on daily two hour classes for children and junior youths using CORDE’s programs. After three month, CORDE trained those who could sustain the classes and made them tutorial class teachers. The CORDE curriculumn has evolved beyond literacy into moral education using Moral Textbooks produced by Foundation for Advancement of Science, India and “Drawing on the Power of the Word” of Ruhi Foundation. These Bahá’í-inspired material increase the receptivity of the population and prepared their hearts to accept Bahá’u’lláh.

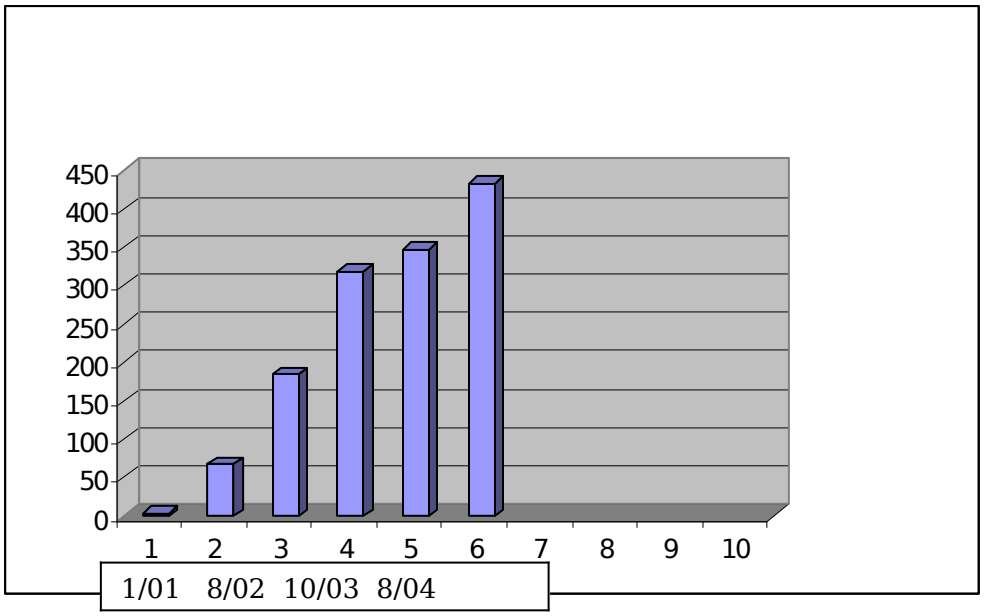
In August 2004 these 10 youth who have completed Book 4 together with the 3 youths left for Battambang to participate in an intensive training in Books 6 and 7 for 20 days. One of the youths was from another part of the cluster called Rovieng. He had come to study in the secondary school in Tbeng Mean Chey and

stayed at the pagoda. He had heard the monks chastising a group of youths for living and eating at the pagoda but actively teaching the Bahá'í Faith. One of the youths had courageously and eloquently explained how the Bahá'í Faith had helped him to educate and serve others. This led to the Rovieng youth to investigate the Faith and joined the study circle. He harboured the desire to arise to serve others.

The trip to Battambang for the intensive institute campaign was physically a long and arduous one. At that time Preah Vihear was only accessible by laterite track from Kompong Thom. These youths had to take a pick up truck to Kompong Thom which took 7 hours and thereon another pick up to Phnom Penh which took them another 4 hours. From Phnom Penh they had to travel 10 hours to Battambang. For them who traveled out of their province for the first time and especially those suffering from car sickness, it was indeed a long and arduous journey, a test of their resolve to learn and serve.

Upon their return the youths sustained 12 children's classes with about 120 children attending and started 1 junior youth group with 13 participants. The youth from Rovieng returned to his village and started devotional gatherings and study circles with his friends. Those in Tbeng Mean Chey invited 21 youths to attend 2 study circles and opened two other villages within the province.

Preah Vihear Bahá'í Population Growth (2001 – 2004)



Preah Vihear Bahá'í Population (Jan 2001 – May 2005)

Data as of	Children	Junior Youth	Youth	Adult Men	Adult Women	Total Youths & Adults	Total Believers
Jan 2001	0	0	1	2	0	3	3
Aug							68

2002							
Oct 2003	16	165	20	6	7	33	185
Aug 2004	35	210	47	17	10	74	319
Dec 2004	55	210	48	24	11	38	348
May 2005	85	210	96	31	12	139	434

In Battambang, they have learnt about home visits and they encouraged 69 people to form 5 teams for home visiting. By December 2004, the number of believers has increased to 348, the majority being junior youths (210) and there were 65 Book1, 22 Book 3 and 13 have completed Book 7. They have formed 20 home visiting teams involving 100 believers. For the first time, they experienced 25 enrollments of youth and adults, surpassing their usual single digit enrollment.

Youth and Adults Who Have Completed Courses of the Training Institute

Data as of	Course 1	Course 2	Course 3	Course 4	Course 5	Course 6	Course 7
Aug 2002	13	4	4	4	0	0	0
Oct 2003	25	25	14	14	0	0	0
Aug 2004	35	25	14	14	0	0	0
Dec 2004	65	56	22	17	0	13	13
May 2005	96	62	54	53	0	32	32

By the early part of 2005, a vigorous institute process was evident. The institute co-ordinators from Battambang accompanied local tutors to start institute campaigns in Preah Vihear. By May 2005, there were 96 Book 1, 54 Book 3 and 32 Book 6 and 7. Multiplications of core activities had taken place. The number of children classes increased to 25 with 485 children and junior youths groups increased to 13 with 189 participants. There were 31 devotional gatherings with 178 participants. Thirty one teams involving 160 believers were formed for home-visits. Through these visits, another 19 enrolled.

Condition of the Cluster Just before Launching of Intensive Program of Growth

The increase in the number of believers over the next 3 months (June, July and August, 2005) was phenomenal. From May to December 2004 (8 months) there was only 86 new believers but the increase in May 2005 alone was 211. In June there was an addition of 233. By August 2005, the population of the cluster

has escalated and crossed the 1000 mark to 1009. The increase was mainly from children, junior youths and youths rather than adults. One third of the population was children and another one third was junior youths and youths formed 24%.

Bahá'í Population

Data as of	Children	Junior Youth	Youth	Adult Men	Adult Women	Total Youth &Adults	Total Believers	Increase in No. of Believers
Dec 04	55	210	48	24	11	38	348	
May 05	85	210	96	31	12	139	434	86
June 05	182	201	101	51	10	162	645	211
July 05	301	298	201	66	12	279	878	233
Aug 05	343	338	246	68	14	328	1009	131

The number of trained resources increased nominally but the multiplications of core activities continued. Children classes increased to 30 with 605 attendees. Junior youth groups increased to 17 with 252 participants. There was also a corresponding increase in CORDE tutorial classes offering daily spiritual education for children, junior youths and youths to 12. The coherence and mutual reinforcing roles of the Training Institute and CORDE accelerated the growth process. The CORDE teachers and Institute co-ordinators were the driving force in expansion and consolidation of the cluster. The Bahá'í-inspired curriculum promoted by CORDE increased receptivity of the population. The years of emphasis on moral education contributed to the character development of junior youths and youths, who aspired to dedicate themselves to educating others. These participants grew up to assume the responsibilities of tutors, teachers of children classes and animators of the junior youth literacy and spiritual empowerment programs.

Spiritual Education and Training

Data as of	Children's Classes		Junior Youth Courses		Study Circles	
	No.[2]	Att.[3]	No.[2]	Att.[3]	No.[2]	Att.[3]
Dec 04	13	202	10	210	5	30
May 05	25	485	13	189	3	27
Aug 05	30	605	17	252	12	54

In August 2005, 21 youths were sent to Battambang in two groups for intensive courses. These 21 youths had already completed their Books 1 – 7 in Preah Vihear but went to Battambang to revise Books 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 and 7 and to study Book 5. This prepared them to accompany their study circle participants in the practices of act of service.

Youth and Adults Who Have Completed Courses of the Training Institute

Data as of	Course 1	Course 2	Course 3	Course 4	Course 5	Course 6	Course 7	% through Course 7[4]
Dec 04	65	56	22	17	0	13	13	34%
May 05	96	62	54	53	0	32	32	23%
Aug 05	134	106	72	55	11	36	32	9.7%

It was obvious Preah Vihear was ready to launch intensive programs of growth. However, there were a few challenges that needed to be overcome or resolved and preparations to be made.

1) The Bahá'í activities were mainly concentrated in the provincial capital, Phnom Tbeng Meanchey, the only township and Rovieng district with the largest population in the Province, about 70 kilometers apart. Given the poor roads and lack of transportation, it was difficult for the Bahá'ís to come together for reflection meetings or collective activities. There was much consultation to separate them into two clusters. However, the learning and experiences from around the world was for clusters with small populations to be regrouped to form one cluster. It was, thus, decided to allow Preah Vihear to remain as one cluster. A decision was made to focus the IPG in Phnom Tbeng Meancheay where the majority of the Bahá'ís lived. The friends in Rovieng, on the other hand, would continue to increase human resources till it ready for intensive growth.

2) While the Bahá'í Faith was recognized by the Ministry of Religion and Cult in 1994 prior to the formation of the National Spiritual Assembly, with the introduction of new laws, the National Assembly had to re-registered. The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Cambodia was officially registered with the Ministry of Religion as a religious body in 2004 and was authorized to hold property, manage its own finances and have activities. However, at every level of government (provincial, commune and village), permit for activities is required. The Local Authorities in Preah Vihear required the Bahá'ís to obtain the permits to continue teaching the Faith and offer the core activities. The National Assembly sent its representatives to approach the local authorities and applied for permission. At every level, they were warmly received. Officials commended the Bahá'ís for their contributions to education and development. The permits were gladly accorded.

3) There was a lack of basic amenities and facilities for administrative functions. There was no Bahá'í Center and none of the friends' home is suitable for administrative set-up. None was large enough to host large gathering or had power supply to operate computer. All statistics were manually kept and sent to Battambang to be centrally entered into the

Statistical Program. Statistics and information about core activities were diligently collected and sent via short messaging using the mobile phones every month to the National Institute Co-ordinator in Battambang. However, analyzing and using these statistics for planning was a capability not yet developed among the Preah Vihear friends.

4) While the institute courses were vigorously carried out, the quality of tutoring and practice of the act of service had to be upgraded. Tutor gatherings were held when friends from Battambang visit. The co-ordinators and tutors had yet to learn to hold their own tutor gatherings and reflection meetings.

5) Although there were many children classes and junior youth groups, there was no co-ordinator for these two lines. The Cluster Institute Co-ordinator and two assistants took care of children classes and a junior youth groups as well. There was an urgent need to appoint co-ordinators for these two lines. They were chosen from the ranks of those experienced in these core activities. Time was needed for them to learn their responsibilities before embarking on new tasks of preparing the cluster for launching intensive program of growth. The National Assembly had intended for these 3 co-ordinators to form a taskforce for launching IPG. The members of the National Assembly and Cluster Growth Committees of Battambang, together with Auxiliary Board Members, accompanied these co-ordinators to mobilize the friends to study the Messages and guidance on intensive growth and learn to plan for expansion and consolidation.

III. Intensive Program of Growth

The members of the National Assembly, National Institute Co-ordinator, the Auxiliary Board Member for Propagation and members of the Cluster Growth Committee of Battambang undertook the arduous journey to prepare the friends for the day of launching. They have been the main tutors each time the youths have participated in the intensive institute courses in Battambang. They have been intimately involved in the process of developing, nurturing and accompanying these individuals, the community and their institutions. With sustained encouragement, they have captained the friends through their tests and trials. They stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the believers as they gained experiences from home visits and teaching families, neighbours, friends and parents of children class and junior youth group participants. The friends of Preah Vihear were now ready to undertake collective teaching.

The Cycles of Intensive Growth- Expansion Phase

The first cycle of the Intensive Programmes of Growth (IPG) was launched on 2nd September 2005. The first cycle was planned according to the experience of Battambang cluster. While in most IPGs the cycle is of 3 months with 2 weeks

of expansion phase, the cycle here was only for two months with only two days of expansion. This was due to high receptivity.

Twenty five friends including a few who traveled two hours from Rovieng, gathered at the reflection meeting to launch the IPG. The National Institute Coordinator (who is also the Chairman of the National Assembly), the Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly (who is the executive director of CORDE) and the Auxiliary Board Member were present to inspire and accompany the friends to the teaching field. They trained all present once again to use the teaching flip chart based on Anna's presentation. All present broke up into teams and practiced teaching each other using the chart. They planned where and who they were going to teach. After an early lunch, the teams went on foot, bicycles, carts and motorcycles to the villages where others were waiting to join them and lead them to friends, neighbours and parents of the participants of children class and junior youth groups. They gathered back the next morning in another part of the cluster, shared their experiences and questions they encountered. They shared answers given and revised the use of the flip chart to offer answers and explanation to the questions. With greater confidence, the teams left to meet other friends waiting to introduce to other contacts. The result was 49 youths and adults joined the Faith during these two days. Subsequent home visits and follow up consolidation activities brought in a total of 198, comprising of 52 children, 48 junior youths, 63 youths, 18 men and 17 women. The total number of believers was 1383.

From the remarks by some of the new believers, it was understood that initially it was curiosity which led a number of the believers to find out about this new religion. However, when they enrolled into study circles and came into contact with the Holy Writings they were attracted to the Teachings.

The second cycle started on 4th of November and ended on 3rd. of January, 2006, also for a period of two months with 2 days of teaching. This time the taskforce was left to plan its own cycle, organize the reflection meeting and the teaching project. It was a bit pre-mature as the members were still inexperienced. As a result only 16 gathered on the days of teaching. This resulted in an increase of only 34 believers (29 youths and 5 children).

The third cycle stretched from 4 January, 2006 to 5 July 2006 and the fourth cycle was also for six months from 6th. July to 5th January 2007. This was a testing year for the community. The National Assembly had purchased a piece of land and started construction of a Center. This big project was a distraction and the financial implication was a test to the believers involved. Although the National Assembly deployed a project manager for this construction, a few key believers were roped in to help. Members of the National Assembly while visiting discovered irregularities in the management of the funds which led to investigation and auditing of the accounts. While investigation was going on, the National Assembly used the opportunity to help the Cluster Growth Committee understand their joint responsibility in the management and utilization of the funds entrusted to them. Further disbursement of funds was withheld from the Cluster Growth Committee. This delayed the launching of the third cycle.

The period of the end of 3rd cycle also coincided with the harvesting (Feb-March) season. Most of the cluster growth committee members as well as majority of the Bahá'ís were busy in their respective fields, harvesting their corps. This again delayed launching of the fourth cycle to July, 2006. The early and bountiful rainfall caused the majority of the youths being taken out of schools to return to the villages to help with planting. The majority accepted the Faith while in the core activities conducted by the youths in their home villages rather then during the expansion phase.

The fourth cycle was launched on 6th of July with another two days of teaching with only 18 participants. The Cluster Growth Committee members demoralized by the earlier crisis were replaced by new members. They were trained based on the new insights gained from the Battambang cluster's subsequent cycles. They proved valuable and timely and helped guide the new CLUSTER GROWTH COMMITTEE to manage the 4th cycle of growth. The CLUSTER GROWTH COMMITTEE was better able to mobilize believers to join the teaching teams and continue teaching throughout the cycle. About 48 persons participated in the teaching project. There were others from the area of the teaching project who had joined the teaching teams or had introduced the teaching teams to their neighbours and friends but were not counted. The participants were better train to teach systematically using the flip-chart. With experience, they were better able to answer questions posed by seekers. Core activities increased and the number of new believers was a record high of 283 (263 youths and adults) bringing the total of the number of Bahá'ís to 1668.

Expansion during Cycles of Intensive Programs of Growth

Cycles			No. of Friends Involved in Collective Teaching	No. of Youth & Adults Enrolled (Total in cycle)	No. of New Believers Entered in the Institute Program	Estimated No. of Seekers in Core Activities at End of Cycle
No.	Start Date	End Date				
1	02-Sept-05	03-Nov-05	25	49 (198)	20	
2	04-Nov-05	03-Jan-06	16	29 (34)	41	110
3	04-Jan-06	05-July-06	18	97 (144)	130	120
4	06-July/06	06-Jan-07	48	263 (283)	161	53
5	07-Jan-07	06-Apr-07	66	82 (116)	19	145
6	07 –Apr-07	16- Jul-07	22	83	13	
7	17-Jul-07	16-Oct -07	50			

The preparation and planning for the 5th cycle became more systematic and from then on each cycle was of three month duration each. By now the Faith has spread to 5 villages within Tbeng Mean Chey and two other provinces, Rovieng and Sangkorn Thmei. The CLUSTER GROWTH COMMITTEE, Institute and ABM consulted the localities to focus teaching based on spare human resources to initiate new core activities especially study circles. In the 5th cycle, teaching took place in two localities, one on each day of the teaching project. The teaching project has resulted in 82 youths and adults accepting the Faith. However, with a better understanding of the Statistical Program and age category classification, many children were re-classified as junior youths and junior youths as youths. As a result there was a net increase of 214 youths and 26 adults while the number of children and junior youths showed decreases. The total population increased by 116.

Growth in Bahá'í Population Pre-IPG, First to Sixth Cycle

Data as of	Children	Junior Youth	Youth	Adult Men	Adult Women	Total Youth and Adults	Total Believers
Aug-05	343	338	246	68	14	328	1009
Oct -05	343	366	300	81	22	403	1112
Dec, 05	395	386	309	86	31	426	1207
Jul, 06	457	403	372	106	45	523	1385
Dec, 06	665	449	400	108	46	554	1668
Mar, 07	551	439	614	120	60	794	1784
Jun, 07	545	436	681	134	65	880	1861

In the sixth cycle, it has increased to two days (weekend) in one locality and the following weekend in another locality. Collective teaching does not take place on weekdays as most youths are in school and since there is no electricity, collective teaching after school is not advisable. A total of 83 youths and adults were enrolled. A similar exercise to re-classify more accurately according to age-groups continued in the sixth cycle. The number of children and junior youths decreased while the number of youths increased. Total number of new enrollment was 83 (64 youths and 19 adults).

By end of June 2007, the total number of believers was 1861; an increase of 852 over 6 cycles i.e. an average increase of 142 per cycle. In the following cycle, it was anticipated that Rovieng, 70 km. away would be ready to have teaching project in their part of the cluster. Teaching project would probably be held there not every cycle but at least twice a year.

A believer remarked, "*I have always wanted to know why there were so many religions and the Bahá'í Faith taught me the oneness of religion. I was*

attracted to the good qualities the Faith taught. Before being a Bahá´í I care only about material things but now I have an awareness of the importance of spiritual matters."

Spread of the Faith within the Cluster

Teaching took place in one locality of the cluster during the first cycle. In the second cycle, the taskforce unable to mobilize the community for collective teaching, allowed teaching to take place in different locality without considering the available human resources to consolidate the new believers. Learning from this experience, teaching project was held in one or two areas based available spare capacity.

As there are no secondary schools in villages, junior youths and youths have to stay in Tbeng Mean Chey with relatives or in the pagodas during weekdays in order to attend school. As the youths teach their fellow classmates, the Faith is taken to their home villages when they return during weekends. The Faith radiated in this way outwards from Tbeng Mean Chey to its surrounding villages. Similarly, it was established in Rovieng Province through a youth who had stayed in the pagoda in Tbeng Mean Chey while attending secondary school.

In 2006, the faith spread to Sangkorn Thmei Province. A public school teacher had to come to Tbeng Mean Chey to take examinations. He stayed with his relatives in town, where he heard about the Faith. He joined a study circle and completed Book 1. Each time he came to Tbeng Mean Chey for official work, he completed a higher sequence course. When he completed Book 3, he initiated children classes and study circles at home. He brought two of his participants to study Book 2 and Book 3 during the intensive institute campaign in Tbeng Mean Chey in August, 2006. With these two new assistants, they initiated other core activities. In August 2007 institute campaign, 20 more people from Sangkorn Thmei completed course 3 and the public school teacher completed the full sequence and his two students, Book 5, ready to initiate junior youth groups.

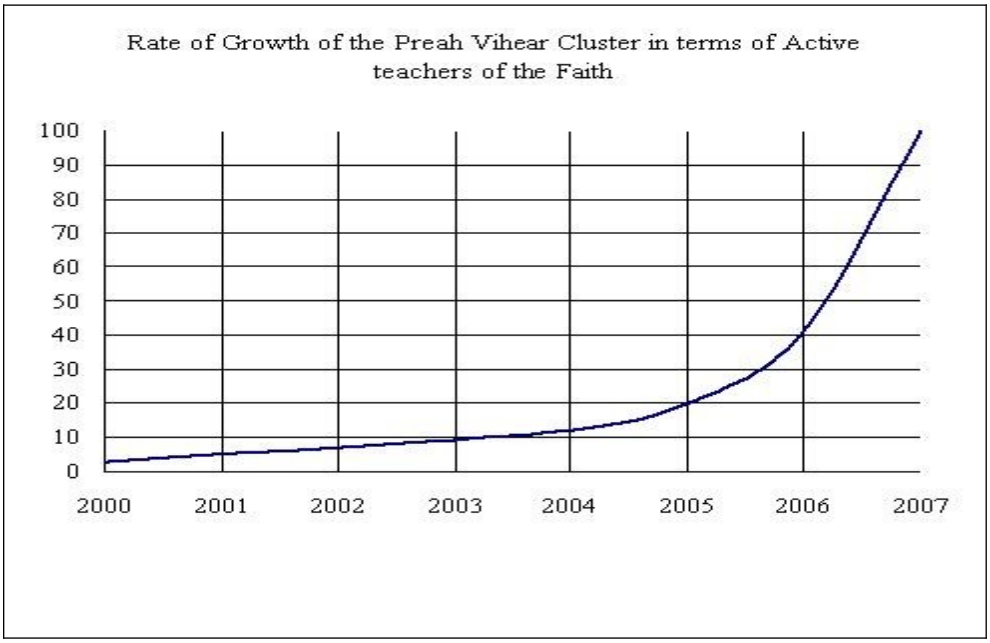
Consolidation Phase and Core Activities

The process of becoming a Bahá'í in Cambodia does not require the individual to sign a declaration card. Religion in this Buddhist majority country is the way of life. Religion is perceived as the source of guidance and teachings to live one's life individually and collectively. Accepting the Bahá'í Faith is thus perceived in the same light rather than 'conversion.' The institute courses and the spiritual education for children and junior youths are accepted as the necessary requirements to acquire knowledge and qualities to be good and do good deeds so as to attain happiness. Those taught the Faith during the teaching project who agree or accept the Principles of The Faith, are invited into core activities as the main means for consolidation of their faith.

A Bahá'í explained, " *I became a Bahá´í in 2005 through another Bahá´í and enrolled in a study circle. After I have finished Book 3, I started my own children class with about 20 children. I have learned what it means to be a better person and the Faith has provided me an opportunity to be useful and to serve God and my village, to help alleviate the poverty around me."*

Human Resource Development through the Institute Program

The institute has been the engine of growth in the cluster. The persistent and consistent efforts of the co-ordinators, tutors, teachers and animators coupled with the great desire of the population to learn has ensured a sustained increase in the human resources in the cluster. This is evident graph below showing the increase in the number of active teachers of the Faith. The growth of the cluster spurts suddenly between the years 2005 and 2006 corresponding with this increase of human resources and core activities just before and after launching the IPG.



Youth and Adults Who Have Completed Courses of the Training Institute

Data as of	Course 1	Course 2	Course 3	Course 4	Course 5	Course 6	Course 7
Aug-05	134	106	72	55	11 (3a)	36	32
Oct-05	168	162	79	58	22(3a)	38	33
Dec, 05	193	172	79	58	22(3a)	38	37
Jul, 06	323	246	115	115	0	55	52
Dec, 06	384	304	191	137	52	98	88
Mar, 07	484	383	305	168	52	114	100
Jun, 07	489	394	306	182	78	124	111

The majority of the human resources in the cluster are youths, majority of whom are still in high school. In the first two cycles of the IPG, the development

of human resources through the institute program saw minimal increase. These youths were more confident to hold children classes and junior youth groups than tutor the courses in the higher sequence. Through the encouragement and accompanying by the national institute co-ordinators and experience tutors from Battambang, more arose to tutor and took on the higher books. Another factor contributing to the increase is the enrollments of a few public school teachers into the Faith, who investigated the Faith after observing the progress and accomplishments of their students.

By the fourth cycle, 384 out of 554 youths and adults (69%) have entered the institute program. The number of those who have completed Book 7 increased to 88. This significant increase in human resources led to an acceleration of the institute process, with 484 completing Book 1, 306 completing Book 3, 52 Book 5 and 100 finishing the full sequence of courses. In the planting season during sixth cycle, institute process slowed down. With the school holidays and the usual institute campaign during this period, it is very likely that an upsurge will take place.

During the 5th cycle, the first Bahá'í youth from Rovieng, had tutored more 20 youths. Twenty of these youths participated in the intensive institute campaign and ten more in the second intensive institute. With these twenty book 7 graduates in Rovieng, the core activities multiplied. By the sixth cycle, public school teacher from another province, Sangkhom Thmei, who was the first to accepted the Faith, has began core activities with his students.

The Junior Youth Animators' Course (Book 5), was introduced during the consolidation period of the 5th cycle. A campaign was held cluster-wide. By December 06, fifty-two completed the course. By Jun 2007, 78 have completed Book 5.

In order to better organize and utilize the trained human resources, each active believer is guided to choose a path of service. They are then organized into departments (armies). The institute co-ordinator encourages and accompanies his army of tutors into the field of service. The children class co-ordinator likewise accompanies and encourages Book 3 graduates to take up this path of service and tutor Book 3 and Book 3a since they have the practical experiences. Those dedicating themselves in child education are encouraged not to be JY animators as it is often observed that these teachers treat JY like children and the JY groups as extension of children class. Junior youth co-ordinator leads the JY animators and helps them to learn and improve on the quality of animating the group. They also tutor Book 5, using their practical experiences and learning to encourage participants of Book 5 to arise to be animators upon their completing the course. This form of mobilization is still in the initial stage. The effectiveness of this strategy is evident in Battambang where over 300 people are organized into armies.

For over three years, a resource person from Malaysia, visit Cambodia every three months and guides the institute board and the national institute co-

ordinator in the planning and strategizing to systematically advance the institute process. He helps clarify concepts in the course and enhance understanding. As he is more exposed to the experiences and learning around the world due to his greater access to resources, he is able to share with the institute a wider range of possibilities and examples to enhance the institute process and acts of service. He assists the national and cluster co-ordinators to analyse statistics, set goals and devise appropriate strategies to increase human resources and advance the process. These are translated into detail step by step operational plan, easy enough for the cluster co-ordinator to follow and national co-ordinators to evaluate and monitor. Regular reflections on achievements and learning greatly enhance the institute process.

" The Teachings led me to think about my life and think about society and the evils in society. I never knew what it meant to pray previously but the Bahá´í Faith showed me clearly about prayers and now I can understand the prayers I chant. The quotations led me to think deeply about the ideas and concepts – deeper as I go from one book to the other. I learned how to teach my children and other people's children systematically. The idea that we can learn and teach others was new to me. I never dream that I have the capacity to teach and train others. I learned how to teach adults, about 'being and doing', managing study circles. Home visits especially after studying Ruhi 2 led me to meet a lot of people whom I have never met before. I used to be lonely, with few friends but now have a lot of friends. My wife has accepted the Faith and now understands why we have to serve others and make our community better. Each one of us can take up a path of service, dedicate ourselves to transform our society," explained the cluster institute co-ordinator.

Children Classes

Initially, the participants of children classes were not just children but included junior youths and youths. In many villages, the schools are often too far away for young children to make the daily trip. The children often attend school when they are much older and stronger to make the distance. As there are no proper record of births, schools often register a 10 year old as 6 or 7 year old (normal primary school entry age) and this become the official age of that person. Thus, those participating in children classes after acquiring the ability to read and write, are often 11 or 12 years old. However, due to malnutrition and late development, these 11 and 12 years old still possess the innocence of children.

The children classes use the 15 lessons of Ruhi Book 3. The children are initially taught the 15 lessons. The same lessons but with a new story, game or art / craft with similar theme are used when the lessons are repeated. The next set of lessons is from Book 3a. After that, the participants join the junior youth groups. The rate of continuation is almost 90% because of the desire to learn.

A good percentage of the participants of the children classes attend CORDE's daily tutorial classes on moral education under its 'Hope for the Heart"

Program and JYSEP wherever CORDE classes are offered. The number of CORDE tutorial classes increased from 4 in 2002 to 8 with 285 participants in January, 2006. In June 2006, because the strong appeal from parents and local authorities, the number of tutorial classes was increased to 18 with 595 participants. The participants comprise 264 children, 258 JY and 73 youths. The number sustained around this number till today. In 2007, five tutorial classes opened in Rovieng to cater for the children and JY there.

Children Classes,Junior Youth Groups & Study Circles Pre-IPG, end of First to Sixth Cycle

Core activities	Number of Activities (Total Number Of Participants)						
	Pre IPG (May)	1	2	3	4	5	6
Children Classes	25 (485	44(778)	45(775)	45(798)	46(859)	55(1025)	43 (1060)
Junior Youth grps.	13 (189)	34 (441)	35 (426)	35 (483)	34 (484)	34 (532)	30 (533)
Study Circles	3 (27)	9 (46)	15 (54)	17 (95)	25 (167)	21 (159)	13 (36)

The cluster is also seeing the fruits its early labour, as those attending their children and junior youth groups by the launching of IPG are old enough to take on the responsibility of teaching children.

Junior Youth Groups

The JY gatherings increased significantly at the conclusion of the first cycle (from 13 to 34) and the number of participants more than double to 441. This number has been sustained till today. Due to the absence of secondary school in the villages, those who were unable to continue their education or have dropped out of school for various reasons, regard this as their opportunity to learn. Girls were often withdrawn from school to take responsibilities for domestic chores or were not allowed to live in towns to continue secondary education, were most keen to participate in junior youth groups. Ensuring regular attendance was a great challenge. Absenteeism is not due to lack of enthusiasm or commitment to learning but the demand of household labour needs. During the months of harvesting or planting season where labour intensive chores have to be done, half to two thirds of the participants will be absent. If they are not working in their family farm, they are offered as labour to relatives or other richer neighbours. Animators too faced similar demands from their families. While this delays the completion of the books, it does not stop them from finishing a book and going up the levels.

Another challenge in the JY gathering is the animators' ability to master the pedagogy and not teaching the books like a language class. After years of stifling of creativity and the power of expression, it is indeed a challenge for the animators themselves to express themselves in speech or arts. However, once empowered they are ready to encourage their participants to acquire the power of expression and shaping their thoughts. The transforming power of the JYSEP is very evident and has attracted many to the Cause.

The junior youth program has benefited from the services of resource persons. These resource persons have been trained by the Office of Social Economic Development. With the acquired capabilities, they accompany the co-ordinators and build their capacity to in turn accompany animators and improve the quality and impact of the program. Animators' gatherings are periodically held to clarify concepts and use complementary activities especially arts to enhance learning. The deprivation of artistic pursuits during the war years has produced a generation of (present day) parents unaccustomed to music and arts and unable to share such pleasures with their children. Having such training is definitely a tremendous help as the many animators lack the exposure to creative ways of facilitating.

During the visit of Mr. Paul Lample in 2004 when he was a counsellor member of The International Teaching Center, he had encouraged the friends to steadily increase the number of junior youths in the program to 1000 in each of the three levels, total 3000. This would mean that 1000 would complete level 3 and enter the institute process every year. A strategy to achieve this high number would be to enroll a high percentage of all junior youths in a village into the junior youth program. By focussing on a few villages, the junior youth co-ordinator will be able to learn to systematically saturate the villages. With the recent campaign to increase the number of animators, this may be a possibility in not too distant future.

Devotional Gatherings

Individual and collective worship is very much an integral part of the Cambodian culture. Altars are common features in the homes and temples are a ubiquitous feature in the community. Monks are invited to chant prayers, mainly in Pali, on every important occasion, be it marriage, funeral or birth. When devotional gathering was introduced in Preah Vihear, it was very much welcomed as they now could read and understand the words of their prayers. The participants were touched and uplifted by the Creative Words of the prayers. Men, women, youths and children memorised and chanted the prayers, often in unison. Though the translated prayers were few, they felt sufficed.

Devotional gatherings are open to all around as dwellings are near and sometimes without doors or walls. Participation is seamless, especially when it is held in the open spaces of the village. Keeping count of the actual number of

participants cannot be accurate but rather an estimate. Even those of other religions freely use the prayers and invite Bahá'ís to pray with them or for them.

Home Visits and Deepening

Visiting each other is an element of community life in Cambodia especially in the rural areas. Reciprocity is fundamental in relationships. However, some of the qualities such as trust were eroded during the years of civil strife where betrayal for self-preservation was common. While the common practice of visiting among relatives is consultation on family affairs, visits among friends or neighbours are often filled with gossiping and backbiting. It is thus challenging to make home visits to share deepening themes and meaningful conversations. However, where this is done, it contributes to healing relationships and building community life.

As houses are small and often occupied by many members of the family of various ages, maintaining focus on the deepening themes and meaningful conversations also poses a great deal of challenge. Often, other members of the family moves in and out during the conversations and domestic chores and children often compete for attention.

Another challenge is the lack of transportation and distances that have to be covered to visit homes. Visiting teams can only cover most homes in a village once during the cycle and thus the progress is slow.

To overcome these challenges, the cluster embarks on deepening classes instead of home visits to share deepening themes. Youths are the most keen to learn and are willing to attend these classes. Each team therefore, is able to share deepening themes with many in one visit. There is also more concentration and understanding in the classes than in the homes.

Integration and Coherence in the Growth Process

The unity of vision of the different development agencies serving in a cluster is critical to growth and development of a cluster. When there is clarity, the work of the different agencies enhances and support rather than compete with the others in the cluster. In Preah Vihear, the Institute and the Bahá'í inspired private initiative, CORDE, collaborate and contribute to the integral development of the cluster.

CORDE played a critical role in human resource development for the growth of the cluster. The teachers of the tutorial classes were chosen from those who were committed to study the courses of the institute as well as tutor them. They assume the responsibility to provide moral leadership in the selfless service of the community. They became the driving force in expansion and consolidation process. The emphasis on moral education contributed to the character development of the children and junior youths, who over the last five years have

grown up to be the current tutors, teachers of children classes and animators of the junior youth literacy and empowerment programs. This ownership and dedicated services has contributed to the empowerment of the people and their determination of the path of development of their cluster.

From those youths attending CORDE classes in newly opened villages, those with capacity are identified and invited for study circles conducted by the institute. The institute then invites them for intensive or centralized courses and trains them to be children class teachers or junior youth animators as well as tutors. From past experience, the percentage of these youths serving after the course was almost 70%. Their commitment was higher and classes were more sustainable. With great capacity created through constant training and capacity building by CORDE directors and resource persons, the CORDE teachers were better prepared to assume other administrative responsibilities for management of the cluster.

Organisational Structure of the Cluster and Scheme of Co-ordination

The Bahá'í community of Cambodia in general and the institutions of the clusters in particular have always had the guidance and attention from The Supreme Body as well as members of the International Teaching Center and Continental Counsellors. The community has been blessed by visits of a member of The Universal House of Justice (2000) and three members of The International Teaching Center visiting 4 times (2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007). Their guidance and advice have helped the Cambodian community advance by leaps and bounds. These guidance and learning are shared directly and indirectly with Preah Vihear cluster. The Members of the National Assembly and Members of the Auxiliary Board, The National Institute, Junior Youth and Children's Class Coordinator regularly visit Preah Vihear and guide the cluster in its activities. It also has the added benefit of an institute resource person from Malaysia who made regular visits to Cambodia and shared with the believers, new ideas, insights, experience and capacity building.

The organizational structure co-coordinating the growth of the cluster is an organic one, starting from simple to complex as the cluster grows. The cluster organizational structure of Preah Vihear evolved, similar to the established pattern worldwide.

For much of the initial part of the growth, the cluster institute co-ordinator bore the responsibility of planning and co-ordination. He was full time and spent much of his time, accompanying tutors and encouraging others to carry out core activities. He was in turn guided and accompanied by the National Institute co-ordinator.

As core activities multiplied, a children class co-ordinator was appointed from the ranks who are active conducting children classes. Later a junior youth co-ordinator was appointed. Initially both were part time as they were still

studying in high school and as the classes and groups multiplied and after their graduation, they assumed full time responsibilities.

When the core activities spread to different part of the cluster, initially two assistant cluster institute co-ordinators, from two different geographical areas of the cluster with multiple activities were appointed. They took charge of all three lines of core activities in their respective areas. It was observed that these assistants were not able to cover all the activities and the need for assistant co-ordinator for children classes and junior youth groups was evident. Eventually, assistants to children class co-ordinator and junior youth co-ordinator were appointed in those areas as well.

Initially it was a taskforce comprising the three co-ordinators of the three lines of the institute – study circles, junior youth groups and children classes. As planning for the expansion phase was mainly based on spare capacity and available human resources for core activities, these three co-ordinators were most aware and familiar with the local situation. During the second cycle, two more members were added. One was the cluster development facilitator and the other was the treasurer. Both these were appointed by the National Spiritual Assembly. The five then planned the subsequent cycle.

During the period when the financial mismanagement was being investigated, the institute co-ordinators continued to take charge and manage the growth of the cluster. When the new team was appointed, the institute co-ordinators were not in the cluster growth committee. Five believers with administrative capacity and experience were appointed as members of the cluster growth committee. Besides the cluster development facilitator and treasurer, each of the other members takes charge of one line of action - teaching, home visits and devotional gatherings. The national secretary and Auxiliary Board Member trained them to carry out their responsibilities. They received more training during institutional meetings, summer school and were invited to Battambang in early 2007 for a joint training with members of other cluster growth committees.

The Auxiliary Board Member for Propagation becomes regular in his visits to accompany the institute co-ordinators and cluster growth committee members from early 2006. He visits the cluster monthly, at critical stages of the cycle to assist them in planning and implementation of the IPG. He was formerly the cluster development facilitator of the Battambang cluster and had gained substantial experience and learning during his service. With his continued collaboration with the Battambang cluster, he is able to share changes and new learning with Preah Vihear Cluster. Similarly, he brings the rich learning from Preah Vihear back to Battambang and other clusters.

The National Institutional meeting held from 6- 8 April 06 in Battambang was the first time, the institutional members of Preah Vihear participated in a major planning meeting. As the joined their co-workers from various clusters of Cambodia to study the Messages and guidance, their vision become clarified. The

spirit generated during the Institutional Meeting by the presence of counselor-member of International Teaching Centre, Mr. Razavi and four Continental Counsellors of Asia and friends from Vietnam, Thailand and Laos convinced them of the greatness of the Faith. When they realized that Preah Vihear was then the second most advanced cluster in Cambodia and an illustrious example for the region, they felt empowered and confirmed. An ambitious plan was made to accelerate the cluster growth.

Description	May 2006	Planned Increase	April 2007	Achieved
Bahá'í Population	1346	500 (125 C 250 JY 125 Y+A)	1846	1800
Study Circles	17	15	32	20
Tutors (Book 7)	41	40	81	100
Animators	0	45	45	52
Junior Youth Groups	35	10	45	34
Children Classes	45	10	55	55
Children	798	125	923	1025
Junior Youth	483	250	733	532

By the second institutional meeting end March 2007, they had surpassed some of their goals and working on achieving others. The few early believers were overwhelmed that from a small community of a few believers, they have become the second largest cluster in Cambodia. They have taken ownership and Preah Vihear Community has proven themselves and earned the trust of their fellow villagers and local authorities that Bahá'ís are agents of change. They have contributed to the education of the children, junior youths, youths and adults and collaborated with them to determine the path of development of their community.